

§ 1200.18 Ex parte communications.

(a) At no stage of the proceeding following the issuance of a notice of hearing and prior to the issuance of the Secretary's decision thereon shall an employee of the Department who is or may reasonably be expected to be involved in the decision process of the proceeding discuss ex parte the merits of the proceeding with any person having an interest in the proceeding or with any representative of such person: Except that procedural matters and status reports shall not be included within the limitation: And except further that an employee of the Department who is or may reasonably be expected to be involved in the decisional process of the proceeding may discuss the merits of the proceeding with such a person if all parties known to be interested in the proceeding have been given notice and an opportunity to participate. A memorandum of any such discussion shall be included in the record of the proceeding.

(b) No person interested in the proceeding shall make or knowingly cause to be made to an employee of the Department who is or may reasonably be expected to be involved in the decisional process of the proceeding an ex parte communication relevant to the merits of the proceeding except as provided in paragraph (a) of this section.

(c) If an employee of the Department who is or may reasonably be expected to be involved in the decisional process of the proceeding receives or makes a communication prohibited by this section, the Department shall place on the public record of the proceeding:

(1) All such written communications;

(2) Memoranda stating the substance of all such oral communications; and

(3) All written responses, and memoranda, stating the substance of all oral responses thereto.

(d) Upon receipt of a communication knowingly made or knowingly caused to be made by a party in violation of this section, the Department may, to the extent consistent with the interest of justice and the policy of the underlying statute, take whatever steps are deemed necessary to nullify the effect of such communication.

(e) For the purposes of this section, *ex parte communication* means any oral or written communication not on the public record with respect to which reasonable prior notice to all interested parties is not given, but which shall not include requests for status reports (including requests on procedural matters) on a proceeding.

§ 1200.19 Additional documents to be filed with hearing clerk.

In addition to the documents or papers required or authorized by the foregoing provisions of this subpart to be filed with the hearing clerk, the hearing clerk shall receive for filing and shall have custody of all papers, reports, records, orders, and other documents which relate to the administration of any order and which the Secretary is required to issue or to approve.

§ 1200.20 Hearing before Secretary.

The Secretary may act in the place and stead of a judge in any proceeding herein. When the Secretary so acts, the hearing clerk shall transmit the record to the Secretary at the expiration of the period provided for the filing of proposed findings of fact, conclusions, and orders, and the Secretary shall then, after due consideration of the record, issue the final decision in the proceeding: Except the Secretary may issue a tentative decision in which event the parties shall be afforded an opportunity to file exceptions before the issuance of the final decision.

Subpart B—Rules of Practice Governing Proceedings on Petitions to Modify or To Be Exempted from Research, Promotion and Information Programs

AUTHORITY: 7 U.S.C. 2111, 2620, 2713, 4509, 4609, 4814, 4909, 6008, 6106, 6306, 6410, 6807, 7106, 7418, 7486, and 7806.

SOURCE: 60 FR 37326, July 20, 1995, unless otherwise noted.

§ 1200.50 Words in the singular form.

Words in this subpart in the singular form shall be deemed to import the

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plural, and *vice versa*, as the case may demand.

§ 1200.51 Definitions.

As used in this subpart, the terms as defined in the Act shall apply with equal force and effect. In addition, unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) The term *Act* means the Commodity Research, Promotion, and Information Act of 1996 [7 U.S.C. 7401–7425]; the Cotton Research and Promotion Act, as amended [7 U.S.C. 2101–2119]; the Dairy Production Stabilization Act of 1983 [7 U.S.C. 4501–4513]; the Egg Research and Consumer Information Act, as amended [7 U.S.C. 2701–2718]; the Fluid Milk Promotion Act of 1990 [7 U.S.C. 6401–6417]; the Hass Avocado Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 2000 [7 U.S.C. 7801–7813]; the Honey Research, Promotion, and Consumer Information Act, as amended [7 U.S.C. 4601–4612]; the Mushroom Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act of 1990 [7 U.S.C. 6101–6112]; the Pecan Promotion and Research Act of 1990 [7 U.S.C. 6001–6013]; the Popcorn Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act [7 U.S.C. 7481–7491]; the Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act [7 U.S.C. 4801–4819]; the Potato Research and Promotion Act, as amended [7 U.S.C. 2611–2627]; the Sheep Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1994 [7 U.S.C. 7101–7111]; the Soybean Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act [7 U.S.C. 6301–6311]; and the Watermelon Research and Promotion Act, as amended, [7 U.S.C. 4901–4916].

(b) *Administrator* means the Administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service or any officer or employee of the Department to whom authority has been delegated or may hereafter be delegated to act for the Administrator.

(c) *Decision* means the judge's initial decision and includes the judge's:

(1) Findings of fact and conclusions with respect to all material issues of fact, law or discretion, as well as the reasons or basis thereof;

(2) Order; and

(3) Rulings on findings, conclusions and orders submitted by the parties.

(d) *Department* means the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

(e) *Hearing* means that part of the proceedings which involves the submission of evidence.

(f) *Hearing clerk* means the Hearing Clerk, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

(g) *Judge* means any administrative law judge, appointed pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 3105, and assigned to the proceeding involved.

(h) *Order* means any order or any amendment thereto which may be issued pursuant to the Act. The term order shall include plans issued under the Acts listed in paragraph (a) of this section.

(i) *Party* includes the Department.

(j) *Person* means any individual, group of individuals, partnership, corporation, association, cooperative, or any other legal entity subject to an order or to whom an order is sought to be made applicable, or on whom an obligation has been imposed or is sought to be imposed under an order.

(k) *Petition* includes an amended petition.

(l) *Proceeding* means a proceeding before the Secretary arising under the pertinent section of an Act.

(m) *Secretary* means the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States, or any officer or employee of the Department to whom authority has heretofore been delegated, or to whom authority may hereafter be delegated, to act for the Secretary.

[67 FR 44350, July 2, 2002]

§ 1200.52 Institution of proceeding.

(a) *Filing and service of petitions.* Any person subject to an order desiring to complain that such order or any provision of such order or any obligation imposed in connection with an order is not in accordance with law, shall file with the hearing clerk, in quintuplicate, a petition in writing addressed to the Secretary. Promptly upon receipt of the petition in writing the hearing clerk shall transmit a true copy thereof to the Administrator and the General Counsel, respectively.

(b) *Contents of petitions.* A petition shall contain:

(1) The correct name, address, and principal place of business of the petitioner. If the petitioner is a corporation, such fact shall be stated, together